Business Administration Students' Functional Knowledge of Business Disciplines

Business Administration BA – College of Business and Economics

Step 1: Student Learning Outcome

Apply knowledge from multiple business disciplines to understand business problems.

Step 2: Methods and Measures

Direct: Capturing student achievement of the learning outcome takes place in the capstone course Strategic Management (MGMT 449), which is taken at or near graduation by most students. This makes MGMT 449 an appropriate course to comprehensively assess the extent to which students demonstrate application of knowledge from core business functions to business problems. Student achievement of the outcome is assessed using an in-class written essay test with four core questions. The questions are taken from an MBA-level Harvard Business School Case. The questions are designed to test students' ability to apply functional knowledge to specific business problems and issues specific to the case.

The four essay questions are rated on a four-point scale using a grading rubric: 1 = Inadequate, 2 = Emerging, 3 = Developing, 4 = Mastery.

The raters selected were highly qualified as they were both lecturers who had already taught the strategy course (MGMT449), were strongly familiar with the case, and underwent a rubric norming session to ensure they focused on functional knowledge application in the students' work. To further support inter-rater reliability, student work was scored by both raters.

Indirect: An exit survey is administered in MGMT 449 to gather data on students' perceived ability to apply knowledge gained.

Step 3: Criteria for Success

Direct: 70% of students score 2.5 out of 4.0.

It should be noted that the target was intentionally set at 2.5 instead of 3.0 as the case selected represents a complex MBA-level case, and students at the undergraduate level cannot be expected to have the same capacity to apply the functional concepts to real situations as graduate-level students.

Indirect: 70% of students will rate their ability to apply knowledge to business disciplines to understand business problems as "Good" or "Excellent."

Step 4: Results

Direct: In spring 2022, 38 sections of MGMT 449 were offered, with a total of 1,116 students. A sample of 14 sections (37%) were selected to assess, resulting in 438 students (39%) assessed. To identify trends through comparison of results, the questions on the essay exam were similar to those asked in the same assessment made two years prior.

The overall score was attained by averaging the percentage items of the four questions, which revealed that 76% of students achieved scores of 2.5 or higher out of 4. Students met the established criteria for success in three questions out of four as follows:

1. External Analysis (Q1) 89.5%
2. Internal Analysis (Q2) 63.6%
3. Competitive Advantage (Q3) 76.5%
4. Strategic Recommendation (Q4) 74.8%

Students' aggregate score was 2.9, which is significantly higher than that of the previous year (2.3). Students also performed significantly better than two years ago, in which the results were only partially satisfying.

Indirect: Overall, 79% of students gauged their perceived ability to apply knowledge to business disciplines to understand business problems as "Good" (54%) or "Excellent" (25%), which demonstrates that students had an overall positive perception of mastering the learning outcome.

Step 5: Improvement Actions

Results indicate that students seem to perform comparatively less effectively in the understanding of the link between functions and company performance, as measured by "Internal Analysis" (Q2). The program will work to understand better which courses discuss the specific link between each function and performance to ensure that courses equally cover all functions. It is possible that some courses describe functional issues but do not effectively explain the implication of functional issues for overall performance. Student performance on question two also revealed they struggled mostly with identifying applications of Technology Development. After a review of course content, it was determined that the program lacks a course that discusses Technology Development along with R&D. For this reason, a new course is under development that will focus on strategy, technology, and innovation.